

Behind the Bolted Door?

By ARTHUR E. McFARLANE

Illustration by Henry Raleigh

AS Willings looked back upon that night, it seemed to divide itself into scenes or chapters. There was the capture of Maddalina, and the Doctor's hypnotic experiment upon her. That had proved one thing, at least—it was Maddalina's fingers that had made those long red scratches on Mrs. Fisher's arms. That was one clue they could depend upon. But what did it signify? Where did it lead them? At the very moment when they discovered it, there had come this new alarm from the Casa Grande. Somebody or something had penetrated the Fisher apartment again, through the lines of policemen or in spite of them. Whatever it was—person or thing,—it was no newcomer: it had been there before. Their own ears had heard the same dreadful rappings: again those heart-rending cries. And, last of all, they had found this tiny blood-flecked handkerchief with Mrs. Fisher's initials in the corner, and on the handkerchief a bit of palm and a white rose.

For a long moment they stood gazing upon that transfixing wordless message, which looked for all the world as if it had been lifted from Mrs. Fisher's coffin, each man of them silent with his own thoughts. Whose hand had laid that rose and bit of palm so carefully upon her blood-stained handkerchief? Was it the same hand that struck her down? The hand that hurled the jagged knife at the E. P. man the night before? The hand that had locked those doors against their entrance on the murder day?

Of all the group, McGloyne was most overwhelmed.

"Boys," he said, "you'll take those things to Headquarters an' have them marked as exhibits. But don't ask me to touch them. An' no more talkin' to the reporters, either, till all this is cleared up, someway."

Then, turning away weakly with Laneham: "But that'll be never—that'll be never! Doctor, what opened them doors will open them again, an' keep on openin' them, if we had them chained and barred."

THE big man was scared—plainly, unashamedly scared. All his boyhood memories of banshees and fairies and disembodied spirits had come surging through his brain to harass him. He gulped as he talked; his hands shook. All of the group had been unnerved, Willings almost as badly as McGloyne—and the Professor worst of all. They found him half crouched, half hanging over the arm of one of the great oak chairs in the reception-room, and helped him to the elevator. As they waited for the car, the Doctor turned to McGloyne.

"Inspector," he asked, "can you tell me this? How was it that the Casa Grande servants were allowed to get into the apartment after the crime and do their regular cleaning work?"

"What? What's that?" The nerves of the big man appeared to jump. "I don't know as I get you!"

The Doctor repeated it. "At any rate," he added, "it's evident that cleaners were allowed to work in the rooms of the Professor, here."

"Nothin' to it"; McGloyne disputed earnestly. "No, no; you've got that wrong."

"I'm right," said Laneham again, "and they took their cleanings with them."

"The deuce you say! An' you mean that they took away somethin' that might count?"

"If nothing else, they took some ashes from the fireplace in Professor Fisher's study."

McGloyne turned to Fisher.

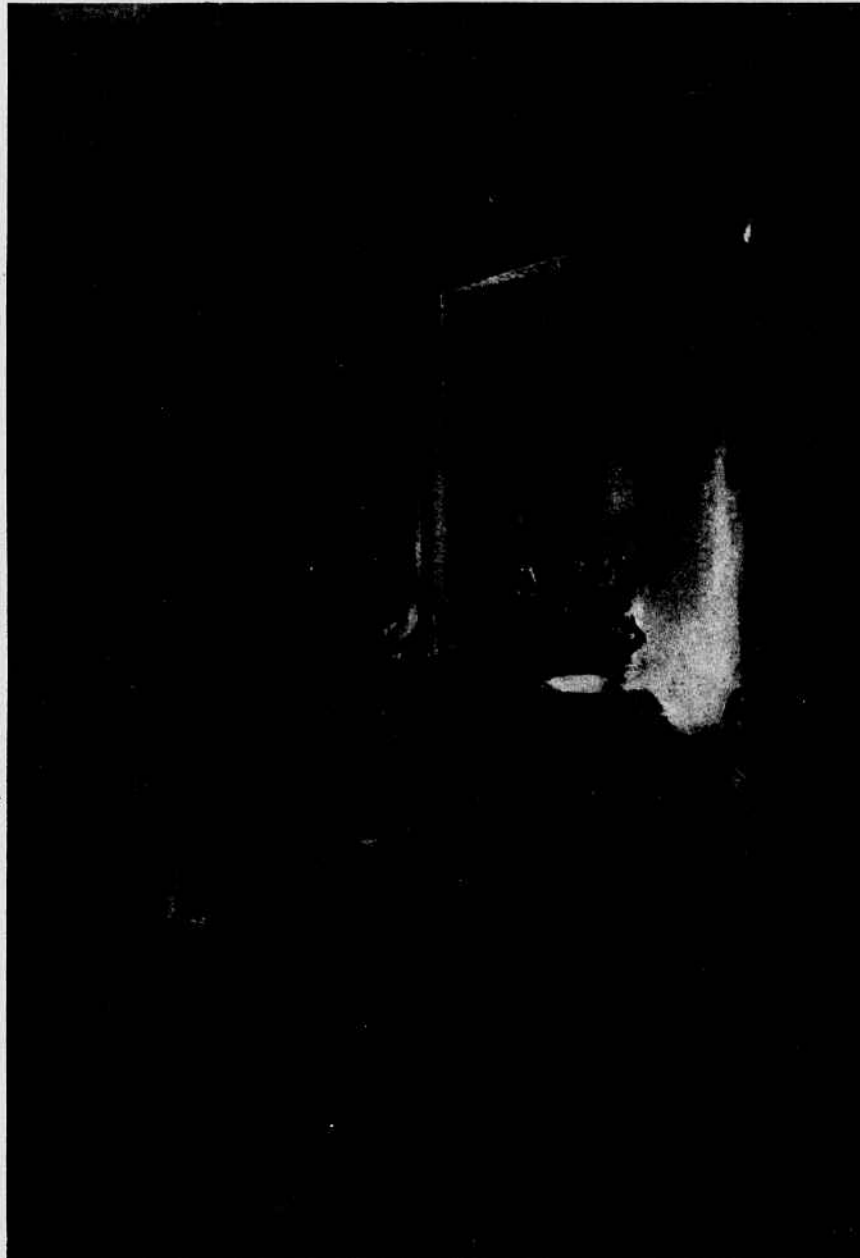
"How about it, Professor? Was it while you was in?"

Apparently Fisher had not heard them.

HOW was Mrs. Fisher murdered, and who was the murderer? Judge Bishop, Mrs. Fisher's lawyer, and Dr. Laneham, her physician, going to her apartment, are admitted by Jimmy, the Cockney butler, who immediately afterwards packs his grip and mysteriously flees, leaving them alone. They call to Mrs. Fisher, and, receiving no answer, seek to enter her private suite. They reach the first door; and instantly, as their fingers touch it, the lock is turned on the inside; they try a second door with the same result; and a third. Who is inside? They hear footsteps within, accompanied by an uncanny knocking on the woodwork. And a voice in agony cries out: "My God, my God!" They burst in the door. Lying on a couch, by her private swimming-pool, is the body of Mrs. Fisher. Every window in the apartment is locked; every door bolted. Mrs. Fisher is known to have pearls of great value in a safe protected by the Electric Protection Company. Is it for these she has been murdered? If so, how did the murderer gain entrance? How has the deed been done, and how has he made his escape?

The Doctor undertakes to solve the mystery. His first clue is the discovery of Jimmy, the last man to see Mrs. Fisher alive. While Jimmy is telling his story, the Doctor's telephone rings. The call is from the Electric Protection people. Some one has secured entrance to the apartment, in spite of the guards, and has made an attempt on the life of one of the E. P. watchmen. Maddalina, Mrs. Fisher's maid, has been missing since the murder. They track her to a notorious Italian tenement, capture her, and bring her to the Doctor's house. The Doctor tries an experiment in hypnotism; and in her trance Maddalina gives evidence that it was she who made the deep scratches on the murdered woman's arms and neck.

Both she and Jimmy testify that Mrs. Fisher made a will on the day of the murder. As Jimmy is giving his evidence, the police arrive, determined to arrest the ex-butler. The Doctor agrees to give him up if the Inspector can prove that no one has got past his guards into the Fisher apartment. The Inspector accepts the challenge, and together they go to the Casa Grande. But, as they reach Mrs. Fisher's suite, again they hear the locks mysteriously click on the inside, again comes the knocking within, and an anguished voice. They force their way in. No one is there; but on Mrs. Fisher's dressing-table they find a blood-stained handkerchief and a freshly cut rose.



"The whole weight of that unknown silent, furious attacker fell upon Laneham and heaved him outward. He had no time to resist."

He was holding and supporting himself by the metal-work of the elevator shaft, even as a few minutes before he had been holding to the door-jamb at the threshold of Mrs. Fisher's haunted rooms.

Laneham raised his voice. "It appeared to be the ashes of a burned magazine—probably a German one, because I could make out the word 'mund'

in big letters on what had been the back of it."

"H'm!" And the big Inspector seemed to be considerably reassured. "Well," he said, "a little ashes—it wouldn't be so much, would it, Professor?"

He dropped his big hand upon the Professor's shoulder.

"What iss it?" Fisher started, with the

jerk of nerves now shaken to their center. "What iss it?" And, when McGloyne had explained,—"Ashes?" he cried. "I know nothing of ashes. And if anybody has been in my rooms, it iss your men, Mr. Inspector, who should know it."

AT this moment the elevator stopped, and they all stepped in. The Doctor waited only for the door to close.

"Another thing, McGloyne. How was it that these elevator boys could make it appear that they had seen Mr. Willings as he went out just after the murder, when, as a matter of fact, none of them was in the lower hall at all, and at least two of them were up on the roof?"

For a moment Willings thought that the Doctor must have taken leave of his senses. Then instantly it flashed upon him that the speech addressed to McGloyne was really made for another purpose. And all of them were immediately aware that it had had its effect. The color of the young West Indian whose hand was on the lever sickened to a sort of café-au-lait. His hand fell away from the safety clutch. The car stopped, staggered, and then began to drop again. The boy's hand fumbled badly as he reached for the catch to let them out, and when, finally, the door did open on to the rotunda floor, when they had made their way out, he waited neither for passengers nor for the starter's signal, but closed the door to and ran up empty.

Fisher seemed to have noticed nothing. He was groping at the front of his waistcoat.

"I haf left my glasses behind," he said thickly, "and I must go up again."

McGloyne let him go alone. The door of the elevator had hardly closed behind him before the big fellow wheeled upon the Doctor, all the detective in him seeming to cry aloud.

"Doctor," he hissed, "say! What's it all about?"

He pushed him ahead into the little alcove room behind the telephone-desk, turned out the big plain-clothes man there on post, and closed the door. Then he burst forth:

"Why—why—" he choked. "My heavens, Doctor, have you gone dead out of your senses?"

Laneham merely shook his head.

"No. I wanted him to hear."

"Well, he sure did all right! An' now what's the answer?"

"For the present, I'm afraid there isn't any."

"There what?"

"I'm not half sure of what I know myself."

"Then why did you need to go tippin' the mutt your hand like that?"

Again Laneham would not answer.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I sha'n't be able to tell even Mr. Willings, here."

"Look here—look here!" The big detective was obviously putting a restraint upon himself. "You know, don't you, that them Jamaica chocolates are just goin' to run for it now?"

"I don't think so. But, if you want, you can put a spotter on them."

"Put a spotter on them! Say, you tell me you ain't got all the information yet you want yourself. Let me take hold of them an' put 'em through at Headquarters for about three hours!"

"No,"—and the Doctor spread his hands,— "that's exactly what I don't want. It'd lose us everything."

He opened the door and looked out.

"Don't think any more about that tonight," he said. "I'm going home, too, in a minute now. But first I'd like to look about again for a bit upstairs."

He let Willings and McGloyne go with

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